

EDITORIALS

A BICENTENNIAL EDITORIAL ESSAY

"We Hold These Truths To Be Self-Evident"

"We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness—That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed . . ."

—FROM THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, 1776

IT IS NOW exactly 200 years since the above words were being written. They have profoundly influenced this great nation and there is reason to believe that they are responsible to a considerable degree for America becoming the great nation that it has. But it is curious that even after 200 years none of these "self-evident truths" has yet become a truly workable reality in America. It therefore seems appropriate to examine them in light of where we are today. Previous editorials in this bicentennial series have addressed some of the ways these "self-evident truths" are now being viewed both by society as a whole in America and in the context of health care—where so many of the technologic, social, economic and political problems of the day seem to be coming into focus.

The series began in January by drawing attention to quality of life as a possible new goal for America and also to the fact that technology, industry, and the social, economic and political institutions of America have become progressively and irreversibly interdependent. The suggested goal—quality of life—is perhaps a semantic refinement of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, but it is also a term that is coming into more frequent use in health care and elsewhere, and therefore merits more discussion and more precise definition. This will be addressed in a special symposium on "Medicine and Quality of Life" in the July issue of this journal. The reality of

interdependence—and worldwide technologic, social, economic and political interdependence in a closed biosphere at that—certainly was not and could not have been foreseen by those who wrote and signed the Declaration of Independence in 1776. In 1976 interdependence is not only with us but it is gradually moving in on independence. The basic truth of this interdependence and its relationship to necessary governance and regulation of independent and yet interdependent technologic, social, economic and political systems thread through the editorial discussions that have comprised this series. It so happens that each one has, tangentially at least, addressed one of the "self-evident truths" that were proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence.

The concept that "all men are created equal" seems to find expression in today's egalitarianism. This was considered in "The Professional in America Today" [February], where it was suggested that today's egalitarianism is not rooted in any social or biological truth, and that the reality of the social and biological uniqueness of every person, and the right of each to at least some degree of personal fulfillment (or quality of life) will of necessity displace the unreality of today's egalitarian approach to almost every aspect of life. The idea that all men are created equal for purposes of equal treatment and equal justice under the law is fair and true, and no doubt what was intended by the signers of the Declaration of Independence. But this is not to be confused with assuming or trying to mandate equality in the lives and experience of individual persons—which seems to be the goal of today's egalitarianism, and which is not only unrealistic but is antisocial and antibiological as well.

The idea of "rights" seems also to have evolved beyond what the signers of the Declaration of Independence are likely to have had in mind. This was addressed under the title "The Growing Dimensions of Professional Injury Liability" [March]. Here the idea of rights, and perhaps the idea of a right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, appear to have been extended to include a right to freedom from personal risk, and when some injury or damage has occurred, to the right to some kind of compensation or redress, usually monetary. The enormity of the economic

impact of this first surfaced in medicine's professional liability crisis a year ago, but now is appearing elsewhere. Bar owners recently have had their liability insurance premiums quadrupled, an effect of courts holding them responsible and liable for any misadventure a patron may have as a result of indulgence at their bar. Even more recently, the Chief Justice of the United States is reported to have called for changes in the tort system of law because of these inimical trends which not only threaten to overwhelm the courts but to bankrupt society as well.

The "self-evident truths" of equality, of rights, and of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness now seem to be producing fundamental change in America, in a sense almost another American revolution 200 years after the first. Under the heading "America in Process of Change" [April] attention was called to the new entitlements that are now beginning to be considered rights—entitlements to housing, income, education, health, as well as to a certain freedom from personal risk and to a degree of personal fulfillment or quality of life. It is almost as though we were developing a new social ethic, with the individual person as the center of the stage, to replace our traditional economic ethic with economic growth and material gain at the center of the stage. This is disturbing to many but it could be the beginning of a bold, new exciting era for America—perhaps even a new era of leadership in the world of today and tomorrow.

The last "self-evident truth," "government . . . with the consent of the governed," was considered in an editorial "On the Governance of Health Care" [May]. Here governance was viewed as independence within a framework of interdependence, and the problem compared with the governance of a biological system—which is what not only health care but modern society really is. It was suggested that the idea of "with the consent of the governed" needs strengthening in today's society. It just is not enough to say that government is simply established with the consent of the governed and then it is free to govern as it pleases. Adolph Hitler was voted into power with the consent of the governed in this sense. The consent of the governed should clearly be a continuous process and should somehow include the consent of any specific groups in society who are to be ruled or regulated, as well as the public at large for whose benefit the regulations are presumably made. It is just as important that the

"self-evident truths" apply to the governed and regulated minorities (such as those who provide health care, for example) as that they apply to anyone else. The mechanisms to accomplish this in practice have yet to be devised, but at issue is the fundamental question of whether the government is to be the master or the servant of the people, the same issue that brought about the American revolution.

The "self-evident truths" as set forth in our Declaration of Independence 200 years ago are an integral part of America's past and will be an integral part of its future. They are essential stepping stones toward achieving the best possible for human life on this planet. But they are no longer freestanding truths, if they ever were, in the sense that they are independent of other reality. And two such other realities or truths are (1) the biological nature of man and of human society and (2) the growing technological, social, economic and political interdependence of humanity on this earth, whether one is speaking of health care, human society as a whole, or whatever. These two truths, and no doubt others, will also have to be taken into account before the "self-evident truths" of the Declaration of Independence can ever become truly workable realities in America. It is evident enough that much of this will come to a head in health care. Indeed it already has.

—MSMW

Male Hypogonadism

THERE IS EXTRAORDINARY redundancy built into the reproductive pattern of the human male. To avoid overrunning the planet, we are enjoined to have only two or three children. Yet in a lifetime, a man can produce as many as 10^{15} spermatozoa. As in many endocrine systems, there is also a significant quantitative reserve in production of the relevant hormones; that is, we *can* make much more hormone than we do. Finally, there are critical elements of timing—certain testicular capacities must be exercised during one particular week of intrauterine existence, while others are irrelevant in childhood but irreplaceable to adults. Given these diverse roles for the testis, it is no surprise to find a complex set of controls and a wide